

Elections and Elites in Africa

Draft

Paper to be presented at the conference “Democratization in Africa: Retrospective and Future Prospects”, University of Leeds, 04 December 2009 - 05 December 2009

Tom Hewitt

International Development Department, University of Birmingham

Abstract: This paper reviews two decades of democratisation in sub-Saharan Africa and the impact of elites on the process. In Africa’s large political landscape several salient features are highlighted. These include: the political diversity of the region, elections versus democracy, presidentialism, ethnicity, and patronage. The role of elites in African democratisation concerns the exercise of power along these different axes. Such power may be corrective (through force or manipulation), persuasive (through legitimation or manipulation), or interpersonal (through patronage). Relatively small in number, elites have invariably developed within (or in close proximity to) the state and therefore have played a critical role in political developments. The focus of the paper is on the outcomes (as opposed to the processes) of elections in Africa. These can be viewed positively – as the democratising potential of elections – negatively – as a smoke screen for continued neo-patrimonialism – or neutrally within a wider political context of formal and informal political institutions. The exercise of elite power has parallel outcomes, positively as a driving force for political and economic change or negatively as the exercise of coercion and other forms of domination for predatory ends.

Elites in Africa have sought and gained political power often as a means to economic power. As a result the political landscape in Africa can tell us much about the exercise of elite power and of the barriers and opportunities for socio-economic development in the region. This review of elites and elections in Africa gives a context for the last two decades of democratisation and examines the impacts of the process on development outcomes.

Elections – one route to the attainment of political power – have been a feature of Africa in the last two decades. The outcomes of elections to date have had a mixed response by observers; from the positive effects of gradual democratisation to the negative view of continued predation. However, a more promising line of enquiry is emerging. This takes elections as a springboard but then digs under the surface to look at the sources of political power and the agents of political power in the region.¹

A focus on elites counteracts a trend of development thinking in recent years to emphasise structure over agency. Thus first structural adjustment and then good governance, capacity building, institutions or elections, whilst important, have been treated in apolitical ways that have tended to take attention away from the central concept of politics and development; power relations.

This paper is a review of the third wave of democratisation in Africa through the lens of its implications for the power relations of elites.

Power relations

To grasp the nature of elite power, the notion of power relations should be delineated. There is an initial distinction between the holding of power (or the power

¹ The Drivers of Change initiative by DFID and SIDA’s Power Analysis were starting points of this and is now being followed through by at least two multi-donor supported areas of research: the Africa Power and Politics Programme (<http://www.institutions-africa.org/page/home>) and the Leaders, Elites and Coalitions Research Programme (www.lecrp.org).

to make someone do something²) and the exercise of power (the power over something/someone or the “ability that certain actors have to facilitate things” (Scott, 2008)). In the former, “authority, consensus and the pursuit of collective goals [are taken] as givens” (Hyden, 2008). But power is always a two-way relation between people and is therefore more diffuse. Drawing on Foucault, Scott observes that “the most effective and persuasive forms of power occur where people have learned to exercise self-discipline over their own behaviour ... subalterns who conform without the need for any direct action on the part of a principal” (Scott, 2008).

From this basis, Scott presents a schematic of forms of power relations. This is useful in understanding the behaviours of elites and is along the following lines.

He distinguishes between power (or domination), counteraction to power and “amorphous patterns” of interpersonal power. Power itself takes different forms.

1. Based on constraint
 - through force/coercion (often based on violence and fear)
 - through manipulation/inducement (where conforming is done ‘willingly’)
2. Based on authority
 - through expertise (based on professional standing)
 - through command (from positions of administrative power)

Counteraction to power can be through pressure (institutionalised counteraction) or through protest (that occurs outside formal institutions). Interpersonal power is scarcely touched on but has implications for sources of power in Africa.

Elites and power

The term “elites” lost much definitional currency through overuse in 1960s and 1970s sociology (Scott, 2008) and lost legitimacy in development literature along with the demise of early modernisation thinking (Daloz, 2003). It is now making a comeback as part of a reassessment of the role of politics and agency in development (Leftwich and Hogg, 2007a, Moore and Hossain, 2005).

The word elite is “most meaningfully and usefully applied to those who occupy the most powerful positions in structures of domination” (Scott, 2008). Thus, elites are “those small groups of people ... in formal or informal positions of authority and power who take or influence key economic, political, social and administrative decisions” (Leftwich and Hogg, 2007a). They can number very few, especially in small countries (perhaps 800-1000 in Benin or Malawi). Larger and more urban countries (for example Nigeria or South Africa) have more. Nevertheless, in all cases elites make up a small portion of the population - perhaps 3-4% at most (Hossain and Moore, 2002). Elites can be broadly characterised as:

“the people who make or shape the main political and economic decisions: ministers and legislators; owners and controllers of TV and radio stations and major business enterprises and activities; large property owners; upper-level public servants; senior members of the armed forces, police and intelligence services; editors of major newspapers; publicly prominent intellectuals, lawyers and doctors; and – more variably – influential socialites and heads of large trades unions, religious establishments and movements, universities and development NGOs ... In most developing countries, governing elites tend to be especially powerful. They often command a particularly large slice of the national income, and the influence that goes with it.” (Hossain and Moore, 2002)

In this definition, we can detect different forms of the exercise of power. Following Scott (2008) coercive and inducing elites are identified by the resources under their control. Coercive elites control access to the means of violence or force while

² For example the exercise of the power of the state through electoral and administrative means.

inducing elites have access to economic assets and induce others to conform “by influencing their rational, self-interested calculations of personal or group advantage” (p. 33). Expert and commanding elites have control over particular social meanings and symbols. Expert elites exercise power through their professional and technical knowledge (such as doctors, lawyers, accountants and so on) whereas commanding elites hold key administrative positions in bureaucracies (Scott, 2008).

Where elites are small in number, there is often considerable overlap of these different forms of elite power. In Africa, elites have invariably been associated with the formal political institutions of the state. Those who have the capital to launch a political career tend to be ‘elites’³ (Chandra, 2006). In fact, “it is rather uncommon to find politicians or top bureaucrats who are not in some way businessmen at the same time (personally or through their entourage)” (Daloz, 2003).⁴

Thus, an important characteristic of elites in Africa since decolonisation is that both politics and economics have been almost entirely linked to the state. Elites have, therefore, developed within (or in close proximity to) the state. Political power brings with it other forms of power.⁵ The combination of small numbers, the economic pay-off of political power, and patronage systems makes African elites persist. As a result, change is difficult because elite interests are deeply engrained. They are “all-directional” (Daloz, 2003) spanning economic, political and social dimensions.⁶ Because of systems of patronage nor are elites autonomous from society. Making them still further embedded. It is these characteristics that have often been interpreted negatively (as predatory).

Two questions arise. Are orthodox sociological interpretations of elite power useful in understanding the political behaviour of African elites? Have new routes to political power – through elections – had an impact on the power of African elites?

Africa’s political landscape

Interest in politics in Africa mushroomed following the wave of multiparty elections across much of the continent during the 1990s. South Africa’s then President Mbeki hailed it a ‘political renaissance’ and the development community enthusiastically poured time, energy and resources into the electoral project to support this ‘third wave’ of democratisation⁷. At first glance, it seemed that the 1990s brought significant changes to Africa’s political landscape. As Nicholas van de Walle points out:

“Between 1989 and the end of 2000, sub-Saharan Africa witnessed 70 presidential elections (spread across most of the region’s 48 countries) involving more than one

³ i.e. upwardly mobile middle class individuals, better educated and better off than the voters whom they seek to mobilise. She notably uses the term ‘elite’ interchangeably with the terms ‘politician’, ‘candidate’, ‘incumbent’, and ‘entrepreneur’

⁴ [where] Daloz argues against a simplistic dichotomy of a modernising elite opposed to the backward and irrational masses and makes the important argument that elites in Africa are actually enmeshed in vertical cleavages, communal or faction-based, and have to maintain vertical networks of subordinates who exert a kind of continuous blackmail on the elites. These networks are maintained through an informal and constantly renegotiable logic (Daloz, 1999). As a result, inter-personal forms of power have a strong significance.

⁵ We should note here, however, that the term ‘elites’ is (often) used differently from the term ‘middle classes’. The latter is frequently employed to describe the people engaged in business activity - an entrepreneurial class, a branch of the elite but distinguished, for example, from the ‘political elite’.⁵ This middle class is actually often absent in African countries – it is the missing middle that donors were keen to promote in the era of structural adjustment. Sklar (Sklar, 2000) discusses the lack of an ‘autonomous bourgeoisie’ in many post-colonial African countries. Where a middle class *is* developing, he describes important differences, for example between northern (traditional) and southern (more modern) Nigeria, or in Ethiopia where a middle class developed within a ‘feudal-type framework’, or in East Africa where Asians held important economic positions (along with Europeans) until processes of ‘Africanisation’ were put in place.

⁶ “The differentiation between political, administrative, economic and other channels within the elites remains far from being manifest” (Daloz, 2003).

⁷ Attributed to Samuel Huntington, who in 1991 observed that transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes occur in waves.

candidate. Over the same period, legislative elections involving at least two parties were held at least once in 42 countries—an average of more than seven elections a year. By the late 1990s, national legislatures in 39 of the 48 sub-Saharan countries contained representatives from at least two political parties. Only Congo- Kinshasa, Eritrea, Rwanda, Somalia, Swaziland, and Uganda held no multiparty elections whatsoever.” (van de Walle, 2002).

By the mid-1990s, however, much of the initial enthusiasm surrounding elections in Africa began to dissipate. While some countries seemed to have made ‘substantial democratic progress’, others clearly had not (van de Walle, 2002). In many African countries, the first fledgling steps of democracy faltered. Despite the institutionalisation of multi-party elections, some concluded that the ‘third wave’ of democratization was in fact not very deep (Gibson and Hoffman, 2002).

15 years later, the verdict on the democratisation of politics in Africa is equally contested. Big questions remain: Have multi-party elections resulted in any fundamental changes in the African political context? If not, why not? Have African elites helped or hindered the process of democratisation? Crudely speaking, the experience of the 1990s pushed analysts into two opposing categories: the optimists (van de Walle, Butler, Barkan) and the pessimists (Diamond, Lawson, van Walraven, Haynes). The optimists emphasise that democratisation in Africa is still very young, and that positive changes *are* taking place, albeit slowly. Pessimists, on the other hand, argue that democratization is being undermined by several inherent characteristics within the African system, including personal rule and clientelism. Despite these differences in perspectives, several common themes emerge in the literature relating to the current African political context. These are outlined briefly below.

Diversity of ‘Africa’: Sweeping generalisations about the political landscape in Africa ignore the reality that African countries are diverse both in terms of their historical experience and local context. At the same time as multiparty elections were being set up in Benin, Ghana and Zambia, other countries on the continent – for example Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Rwanda - plunged into disorder and violent conflict. Even the more peaceful countries showing evidence of democratisation cannot be assumed to be a homogenous group, or even to have similar characteristics.⁸

Presidentialism: Because power in most African countries is weakly institutionalised, the fundamental rules of the game have changed little despite the advent of multi-party elections (Chabal and Daloz, 1998). Today, the majority of African countries operate presidential rather than parliamentary systems. Partial exceptions to full presidentialism include Angola, Namibia and Equatorial Guinea (semi-presidential regimes), Swaziland (absolute monarchy), Lesotho (parliamentary constitutional monarchy), Ethiopia and Mauritius (parliamentary regimes) and Mauritania (military dictatorship) (Resnick, n.d.). In reality though, many of these exceptions exhibit the same traits as presidential systems and the more important measure is how accountable a regime is to its citizens. Presidentialism can ‘result in the personalisation of power because the executive derives legitimacy from voters rather than from gaining the confidence of the legislature’ (Resnick, n.d.). In other words, leadership is structured around personalised, particularistic networks, rather than formal legislation. As such, presidential regimes have undermined democratisation on the African continent.

A corollary of this argument is of course that **elections do not mean democracy**. Despite the advent of multiparty elections, Africa’s leaders have not significantly changed during this period. In several instances since 1990, for example, ‘the former

⁸ “Only with the greatest simplification, for the sake of convenience, can we say ‘Africa’. In reality, except as a geographical appellation, Africa does not **exist**.” (Kapuscinski, 2001)

African 'dictators'... [have been]...re-elected in recognizably 'free and fair' multi-party elections' (Chabal and Daloz, 1998). This limited changeover signifies that the very notion of leadership in Africa is synonymous with access to resources as a source of credibility. In other words, it is indicative of the fact that clientelism, or 'the exchange or brokerage of specific services and resources for political support in the form of votes' (Erdmann and Engel, 2006), has become the informal style of politics practiced in much of Africa.

Ethnicity: Often, the single most important factor (superseding programmatic and/or ideological factors) that enforces loyalty to an individual or party in Africa is ethnicity. Ethnic mobilisation underpins both political interaction and conflict across the continent. Politicians have a strong incentive to maintain the support of their own lineage or ethnic group (van de Walle, 2003). In order to secure their support base:

"politicians need not only to promise to favour some distinct category of voters, but also to establish greater credibility among this category of voters than other politicians. A strategy of distributing favours equally across individuals from all ethnic categories does not give any candidate a competitive advantage" (Chandra, 2006).

The salience of ethnicity in Africa also has important implications for economic development, inequality and social stratification. It is argued, for example, that Africa is more unequal today than it was 30 years ago (Milanovic, 2003). Milanovic proposes that such high inequality is 'principally a political phenomenon' (p.3) and concludes that politics 'works through ethnicity (and religion)' (p.34). Ethnic fragmentation has therefore had a profound impact on all aspects of life in Africa.⁹

Personal rule and patronage: In states without effective institutions, formal rules are openly defied and ignored, so while formal institutions exist on paper in Africa, they do not shape the conduct of individual actors (Hyden, 2006). Chabal and Daloz (1998) argue that 'the state in Africa was never properly institutionalised because it was never significantly emancipated from society. This was partly due to historical and cultural reasons, but it primarily resulted from the informalization of politics. The 'emancipation of the state... rests on the establishment and operation of a civil service unconstrained by the dynamics of social pressures' (p.5). This means the public and private spheres become functionally distinct, and appointment and advancement are based on meritocracy. Yet in much of Africa, power remains personalised and based on informal relations, and 'the legitimacy of African political elites derives from their ability to nourish the clientele on which their power rests' (p.15). In order to legitimise themselves and secure a broad support base (which is built on practices of redistribution), the political leadership in Africa controls access to resources that others need but cannot get on their own (Hyden, 2006).

What do these features add up to?¹⁰ This clientelist system is in many cases understood to be built upon the capture and control of state resources. In presidential systems, this means access to state resources is also highly concentrated in the presidency (Chabal and Daloz, 1998, Hyden, 2006, van de Walle, 2001, van de Walle, 2003). Chandra argues that 'a democracy will not be patronage-based if the private sector is larger than the public sector as a source of jobs and provider of services, or if those who control the distribution of state resources and services cannot exercise discretion in the implementation of policy concerning their distribution' (Chandra, 2006). Neopatrimonial regimes are substantially weakened when their rulers become unable to distribute sufficient patronage, and economic crises can therefore present significant crises of legitimacy for African neopatrimonial rulers (Gibson and Hoffman, 2002). While the greatest threat to the survival of patrimonialism is the disappearance of state resources, analysts have suggested that

⁹ There is little research in this area and it merits attention. See also (Gelb, 2001) and (Nkurunziza and Ngaruko, 2002) on Burundi who come to similar conclusions.

¹⁰ A detailed discussion of the African patrimonialism is in Cammack (Cammack, 2007)

this threat only affects the party or individual in power - patrimonialism as a system will survive in tact (Randall and Svasand, 2002). On the other hand, Hyden also points out that there are African rulers who have remained in power, and carried out their jobs effectively, without the extensive use of public resources (Hyden, 2006).

Given the pervasiveness of personal rule in Africa, the pressure from the international community to undertake democratic reform has resulted in 'partial reform syndrome', whereby leaders commit rhetorically to reform, but only carry it out to the extent that it does not hurt politically important individuals among the political elite (Mette Kjaer, 2004). Indeed in many cases, neopatrimonialism has become the norm, implying 'a mixture of... patrimonial and legal-rational bureaucratic domination' (Erdmann and Engel, 2006).¹¹ Some analysts further argue that informal, *de facto* traditions and practices are evolving to adapt to new circumstances. It is important to acknowledge that patronage politics exists in many democratic systems that are deemed legitimate – for example, the powerful lobbies that wield influence over Congress in the United States. It is therefore possible to understand democratization as a mechanism for reducing the illegality of neopatrimonial relations (and instituting a more codified system of patronage), rather than a complete reversal of them.

Elections

The literature on elections in Africa since the early 1990s addresses a variety of questions, many of which have so far yielded only partial or tentative answers. Questions concern the extent of democratisation, the nature of the electoral process and its outcomes, democratic consolidation, the nature of political parties, incumbents and oppositions, the changing role of branches of government and the civil service and the effects of decentralisation. Within these broad questions are others related to ethnicity, religion and local politics/elites.

As noted above, most African countries in 1990 were neo-patrimonial, meaning that they were hyper-presidential, the principal political glue was clientelism, and clientelism was primarily about gaining access to state resources (Cammack, 2007). Elites operated within the political system often using public office for private gain and for direct access to the resources of the state. The wave of elections from the early 1990s has produced optimists and pessimists for Africa's electoral and democratic prospects: the optimists say that democracy can develop over time, that elites and political institutions will evolve to look more or less like in other places, that this process will be a gradual consolidation, and that clientelist relations will become more codified, less informal (e.g. Schedler, Lindberg, van de Walle and others); the pessimists say that the political process in Africa, the behaviour of its elites and their use of and interaction with institutions is different from established liberal democracies and will remain so for a long time to come (Carothers, 2002, Chabal and Daloz, 1998, Schatzberg, 2001).¹²

Multi-party elections are now ubiquitous in the region. Democracy is not.¹³ Most of Africa has practiced electoral politics since the mid 1990s. Only a handful of states have really introduced meaningful systems of democratic competition and participation. The others are doing what Diamond (2002) and Schedler (2002a, b) call "electoral authoritarianism" or "electoral autocracy". The wave of elections in the

¹¹ Erdmann and Engel provide a useful review of the literature and definitions around neopatrimonialism, arguing that analysts and Africanists tend to use the term in a variety of ways. See (Erdmann and Engel, 2006).

¹² Also see (Joseph, 2003) as an example of the pessimistic strand of this camp.

¹³ It is: "the twofold challenge [of] increasing analytic differentiation in order to adequately characterise the diverse regimes that have emerged in recent years and maintaining conceptual validity by avoiding conceptual stretching" (Collier and Levitsky, 1997). In the case of research in African countries, the dilemma of "democracy with adjectives" has become quite acute. On the one hand, it is evident that the orthodox understanding of liberal democracy is only partially applicable in the case of many African countries. On the other, the explosion of adjectives to describe different regime types has put the notion and validity of comparative politics under strain.

1990s seemed to signal a significant change in Africa’s political landscape, but it is increasingly evident that some countries “have made substantial democratic progress, while others have not” (van de Walle, 2002).

Table 1 shows indicators of political rights and civil liberties in 2009 as calculated by Freedom House. This contrasts with the situation 30 years ago. In 1980, four countries were considered ‘free’, compared to 10 in 2009. A further 15 were considered ‘partly free’ in 1980, compared to 23 in 2009. The number of countries considered ‘not free’ has declined from 27 to 15 in the same period.¹⁴ It is significant that the flurry of electoral activities in the period 1990-95 was the starting point in this partial improvement in the freedom House indicators (Freedom House, 2006).

Table 1: Indicators of Political Rights and Civil Liberties in Africa – Number of countries in 1980 and 2009

Year	Free	Partly Free	Not Free
1980	4	15	27
2009	10	23	15

Source: (Freedom House, 2009)

There is still a preponderance of ‘partly free’ countries in Africa. What does this mean? It is a confirmation that the democratic process in Africa is not at a point recognised in the orthodox sense. However, the situation can be interpreted in a number of ways.

By the mid-1990s, there was a growing scepticism that the wave of democratisation was not all that it had been expected to be. One World Bank observer identified eight causes for this scepticism: the weakness of political parties; manipulation of the electoral process; a narrow political field; a constrained civil society; a controlled press; the absence of “civility”; privatised violence and politicised armies; and international support for dictatorship (particularly in Francophone Africa) (Monga, 1997). Is that the whole story? A decade later the jury is still out.

Some studies give us a better picture of the routes that democratisation is taking. The literature takes us in two directions:

One side of this argument is that it is no longer useful to talk about transition to democracy; the optimism of the early 1990s was misplaced. Carothers’ (2002) work is important here because of its research and policy implications. He argues against the simple optimism of agencies such as USAID that assume: 1) a move away from authoritarianism naturally means a move toward democracy, 2) democratisation happens in stages – of opening, breakthrough, and consolidation – in some inevitable way, 3) whilst elections are not equal to democracy, they are deemed to be most significant in and of themselves, 4) underlying conditions will not be major factors at the onset or the outcome of the transition process,¹⁵ and 5) democratic transitions are built on coherent functioning states (Carothers, 2002). The ‘partly free’ and arguably some of the ‘free’ countries listed by Freedom House above fall into what Carothers calls a ‘grey zone’¹⁶ where there are some democratic attributes

¹⁴ Put the other way, over 30 per cent of countries in sub-Saharan Africa are ‘not free’ in 2009.

¹⁵ “All that seemed to be necessary for democratisation was a decision by a country’s political elites to move toward democracy and an ability on the part of those elites to fend off the contrary actions of remaining antidemocratic forces” (Carothers, 2002)

¹⁶ Or what Shedler (Shedler, 2002) calls ‘the foggy zone’ of which more below.

but "they suffer from serious democratic deficits."¹⁷ Those countries in the middle two columns of Table 2, for example, would fall in the grey zone.

Table 2. Categorization of African Political Regimes in 2006

Consolidating Democracies	Democratisers	Semi-Authoritarians	Autocratic
Benin	Comoros	Angola	Cameroon
Botswana	Kenya	Burkina Faso	Chad
Cape Verde	Lesotho	Burundi	Dem. Rep. of Congo
Ghana	Liberia	Central African Rep.	Equatorial Guinea
Mali	Madagascar	Congo	Eritrea
Mauritius	Malawi	Cote d'Ivoire	Gabon
Namibia	Mozambique	Djibouti	Guinea
Sao Tome & Principe	Niger	Ethiopia	Mauritania
Senegal	Nigeria	Gambia	Somalia*
South Africa	Seychelles	Guinea Bissau	Sudan
	Sierra Leone	Rwanda	Swaziland
	Tanzania	Togo	Zimbabwe
	Uganda		
	Zambia		

Source: (Siegle, 2006) * Somalia is still largely ungoverned, though here classified as autocratic.

Trying to get to grips with what these kinds of democracies could be labelled led to what has been described "democracy with adjectives" (Collier and Levitsky, 1997). Carothers, in an attempt to simplify the plethora of democratic descriptors, identifies two strands of political syndrome: 'feckless pluralism' where participation remains shallow and troubled and political elites (from all parties) are perceived as being corrupt, self-interested and ineffective¹⁸ and 'dominant power politics' where there may be 'limited but still real political space, "yet one political grouping ... dominates the system in such a way as there appears to be little prospect of alternation in power in the foreseeable future" (Carothers, 2002). A major political problem in this situation is "the blurring of the line between the state and the ruling party ... [where] ... the state's main assets ... are gradually put in the direct service of the ruling party" (p.12). This situation has been prevalent in many countries in Africa, for example, Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, Tanzania, Gabon, Kenya and Mauritania.¹⁹

The other side of the argument is that whilst incomplete and compromised, some positive democratic outcomes or trends can be identified in some of the electoral experiences of Africa. Staffan Lindberg has published widely on this. He has argued that elections in Africa have had positive impacts on democracy (as measured by improvements in civil liberties) (Lindberg, 2006) and that the very process of holding elections has been self-reinforcing of democracy (Lindberg, 2004).²⁰ The regimes falling in the 'partly free' Freedom House category have been identified as falling somewhere in the range of electoral democracy and electoral autocracy identified by Schedler (2002a, b).²¹ Pessimists might argue that such a distinction is splitting hairs and both types of electoral system are proof that democracy is blocked in Africa. A more optimistic approach argues that 'alternation of power' shows a move towards

¹⁷ Including poor representation of citizen interests, low levels of political participation beyond voting, frequent abuse of law by officials, and so on.

¹⁸ Feckless pluralism is prevalent in Latin America, Carothers argues, but instances in Africa are also found. Carothers includes Madagascar, Guinea-Bissau and Sierra Leone.

¹⁹ This leads us again to the notion of neo-patrimonialism amply described and analysed in (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1994).

²⁰ Such findings do not imply that clientelistic behaviours are not still common as illustrated in his study of Ghana (Lindberg, 2003).

²¹ And following (Diamond, 2002).

electoral democracy.²² Alternation of power can be defined as a 'tipping game' (van de Walle, 2005) – whereby the 'growing probability' of alternation of power (due to a number of interrelated factors) causes cohesion amongst opposition parties. But little by little (and with frequent backward steps) alternation of power can fortify democratic expectations. Such a 'tipping' process is more likely to take place in situations where it is difficult to distinguish between political platforms – typically the case in African countries – such that relationships between parties are very fluid. Another source of fluidity is from electoral fraud and elite deal making that incumbents frequently employ (van de Walle, 2005).

Schedler's concept of "nested democratisation" is useful here. His argument is that in electoral autocracies, electoral competition is "nested" within a broader competition to redefine the rules. The broader game is a progressive process of democratisation. Autocrats can win in the short run, but with every election they are legitimating the mechanisms to push themselves out of power. Even so, it is very important to distinguish these electoral autocracies from democracies. One key way to do this, as noted above, is to focus on alternation. Where alternation has occurred there is likely to be both more democracy and a greater likelihood that new elites are emerging (Schedler, 2002b).

Elites

The implications of the above arguments for the behaviour of elites are twofold. On the one hand, the pessimistic view is that the same old elites are simply adjusting to new circumstances, finding ways to continue their political and economic power bases. On the other hand, slow consolidation of democracy is putting growing pressure on elites to change becoming more accountable and transparent in their behaviour.

Multi-party elections evoke questions about how elites are changing or adapting: Are new elites emerging? Is there a deepening of elites (to include, for example, other ethnic groups, or women, or the private sector, etc)? What impact does ethnic heterogeneity have on elites? Are there elite linkages across institutions?

Orthodox political science says that liberal democracy works best with a strong middle class that plays its part in keeping the state and its political elites accountable. This is frequently through associational activity in civil society. Another literature identifies elites as the lynchpin in fostering a developmental state. For instance, Leftwich argues that:

"first and foremost, all developmental states have been led by determined developmental elites, which have been relatively incorrupt... and fiercely nationalistic... no developmental state has exhibited the one-man 'sultanism' of many African states. On the contrary, they have often been run by shifting coalitions of diverse interests and, as socio-economic change has occurred, all such states have experienced (sometimes severe) intra-elite political and policy conflict, often intensifying over time." (Leftwich, 2000).

The elites to which Leftwich refers also had a relative degree of autonomy (along with the institutions that they commanded). A key point for African elites is that to date they have exhibited little autonomy from presidential 'big men' - a single point from where political and economic power emanates and therefore around which elites assemble. As has already been argued, in many African countries the state itself has been the locus of class formation and elite activity, thus reducing the ability of society

²² In Zambia, for example, there was alternation. It is more democratic than Cameroon where there has been no alternation of power. Where a dictator is still in power there is no democracy, e.g. Togo, Ivory Coast, Chad, CAR (Ghana under Rawlings was an exception to this).

to hold the state in check. In what Chandra (2006) calls patronage democracies,²³ this “produces an overwhelming preoccupation with politics on the part of both elites and voters seeking both material and psychic goods ... in patronage democracies, obtaining control of the state is the principal means of obtaining both a better livelihood and higher status” (p. 9).²⁴

The degree of ethnic variation is critical in determining the strategies deployed by elites. As Posner points out:

“ African voters seek to maximize the amount of resources they can secure from the state and that politicians, knowing this, seek to attract and maintain their political followings by promising resources to those who support them...voters believe that having a member of their own ethnic group in a position of power will increase their access to such resources. They discount the election promises made by candidates who are not their ethnic kin and find credible only those promises made by candidates who share their ethnic background. Both of these rather uncontroversial claims are supported by the vast literature on neo-patrimonialism in Africa “ (Posner, 2001).

Such a situation has served political elites well in the past, as van de Walle argues:

“it is more useful to think of clientelistic politics in Africa as constituting primarily a mechanism for accommodation and integration of a fairly narrow political elite rather than the logic of mass party patronage. Most of the material gains from clientelism are limited to this elite. The stronger link between political elites and the citizenry is through the less tangible bonds of ethnic identity. Even in the absence of tangible benefits, citizens will choose to vote for individuals of their own ethnic group, particularly in ethnically divided societies. Less than the expectation that they will benefit directly from the vote, citizens may feel that only a member of their own ethnic group may end up defending the interests of the ethnic group as a whole, and that voting for a member of another ethnic group will certainly not do so”. (van de Walle, 2006)

Elite politics are therefore different when ethno-regional differences are very politically salient (Cameroon or Nigeria) than in countries which may be ethnically diverse but in which ethnicity is not polarized (Tanzania or Senegal), let alone when there is ethnic homogeneity (Lesotho or Botswana). The political process tends to be unstable with ethnic heterogeneity. Elites make claims on ethnic identity as a way of securing votes. As a result there continues to be an absence of programmatic debate around policy in elections and campaigns are conducted almost entirely on the basis of personal and ethno-regional support (van de Walle, 2006). But this is not a straightforward process with predictable outcomes. The work of Posner for example, examines multiple possible ethnic “cleavages” and how they may be different in one-party and multi-party systems:²⁵

“Although ordinarily lumped under the umbrella term ‘ethnic’, communal conflict can take many forms. Sometimes competition takes place along religious lines. At other times, competing groups are distinguished from one another by language. At still other times in-group/out-group distinctions are made on the basis of tribal affiliation, clan membership, geographic region of origin, or race. Within a single country, each of

²³ “... democracies in which the state has a relative monopoly on jobs and services, and in which elected officials enjoy significant discretion in the implementation of laws allocating the jobs and services at the disposal of the state” (Chandra, 2006)

²⁴ “...in sub-Saharan Africa it is always a question of exchange – a universe where gifts and counter-gifts, accumulation and redistribution are the spinal column of mechanisms of political legitimation. Even if there are some elite groups in Africa who organise themselves in a horizontal logic, these tend to be fragile, and the force of vertical links between “unequals” along familial, ethnic-regional, religious and clientelist lines are much stronger.” (Daloz, 1999).

²⁵ His argument is that “under conditions of multi-party competition, ethnic cleavages that define large blocks of people tend to emerge as the axis of political conflict, coalition-building and voting, whereas under conditions of one-party political competition, ethnic cleavages that define smaller, more localized groups of people tend to play this role. The salience of ethnicity *per se* may not change, but the salience of the particular dimension of ethnic cleavage that structures politics is transformed by the shift in regime type” (Posner, 2001).

these distinctions may serve, in different situations, as a potential axis of social differentiation and conflict” (Posner, 2001).

There is much evidence that however Africa’s political elites have divided along ethnic lines, they have been predatory, unproductive and misusing surpluses (Douma, 1999, Mbeki, 2005)²⁶ and have continued to do so within a context of electoral politics. Even in situations hailed as successful, such as Uganda in the 1990s, political elites continued to misuse public resources (Mwenda and Tangri, 2005). But there is variation. For example, the richer the country, the bigger the middle class - a bourgeoisie (more autonomous than elites) putting pressure on the system (for better roads, an end to the predatory state, and so on). A good example is Ghana, where the middle class has had some success in putting pressure on political elites (Luckham et al., 2005). Mali is a contrary example, where there is no such pressure.

Less attention has been given to the potential for elites to play a part in changing old practices. The work of Houssain, Moore and associates (Hossain and Moore, 2002, Reis and Moore, 2005) on elite perceptions of poverty is interesting in this respect and there are important indications in their research for any future work on elites. Their cautious optimism about the potential for elites to want to engage in poverty reduction is refreshing in contrast to the widespread cynicism found in the literature. Their research is based on the work of Abram de Swaan, who explores the emergence of welfarism in Europe and the United States (Swaan, 1988). The research questions generated by Swaan’s work included: would persisting poverty and inequality in less developed countries point to the absence of a social consciousness among elites? Would Southern elites exhibit the proto-sociological wisdom that earlier led their counterparts to support social policies? How do Southern elites position themselves vis-à-vis collective initiatives for social inclusion?

There is no hard evidence on whether Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are having any impact on the stronghold of political elites of Africa. Some research indicates there is limited but widening participation in political processes. A comparative study of South Africa, Ghana and Uganda, found that that CSOs themselves reflect wider society cleavages, and are represented on the whole by elites. Robinson and Friedman argue that, “a small number of urban-based intermediaries led by middle class elites command a disproportionate share of foreign aid resources. Many of these organisations exert a limited influence on public policy and do not make an enduring contribution to democracy through their activities” (Robinson and Friedman, 2005). Some argue that this concentration of foreign aid around a relatively small number of elite intermediaries reflects a deliberate strategy of fostering a vision of democracy that is restricted to elite competition and representation (Hearn, 1999, Robinson and Friedman, 2005). They suggest that aid donors seek to fund CSOs to promote support for economic liberalism and counter more radical visions of democracy based on popular participation and redistribution.

However, there is surprisingly little literature in general that examines measurable outcomes of democratization in general in Africa. An exception is the work of Stasavage (2005). He makes the hypothesis – and then goes on to argue it statistically²⁷ – that “contested elections may have prompted African governments to be more responsive to the demands of the rural groups that form the majority of citizens of nearly all African countries. Under authoritarian regimes, in contrast, rulers will need to be more responsive to urban groups” (p.344). Through examining spending on education, and in particular primary education, he shows that multiparty electoral competition has been associated with greater government spending on

²⁶ Country examples of this line of arguing are, for example: Ethiopia (Abbink, 2006), Madagascar (Marcus and Ratsimbaharison, 2005), Uganda (Mwenda and Tangri, 2005)

²⁷ Using a dataset on education spending for 40 countries from 1980-96.

primary education. Whilst he indicates the need for further research, he speculates that electoral competition will have a bigger effect on education spending where electors do not vote primarily on ethno-regional lines (Stasavage, 2005).

An alternative hypothesis is that democratisation tends to divide elites by pitching them in competitions for electoral support, and by changing the political logic from assembling as large a majority as possible (the logic of the old single party regimes), to legitimating rule by the smallest possible winning coalition. Crook (1997), for example, explores this argument in Cote d'Ivoire. One consequence may be that elites appeal to lower levels of ethnic identity in electoral competitions than they do in single party regimes, which can lead to an exacerbation of ethnic polarisation in new democracies (Posner, 2005).

Elections and elites

There are many instances – and a long history – of the execution of power through coercion by African elites. Despite some changes (and many setbacks) as a result of two decades of elections the region, the enduring power of a small number of elites cannot be explained by force alone.

The manipulative power of elites continues to play a critical role. Elections, and by now often repeated elections, have not resulted in the turnover of political representatives that we might expect. In many cases the same old names secure power. How has this come about?

The continuity of the power base of big men in African politics can in part be explained by a particular form of manipulative power that is mixed with a good dose of interpersonal power. As discussed earlier, patron-client relations involve a degree of reciprocity of expectations through informal checks and balances in both directions (Ver, 2008). Manipulative power is accepted when interpersonal power is based on “self interested calculations of personal or group advantage”.

Another twist in the exercise of power in African politics could somehow seal the status quo for some time to come. It was argued earlier that those who have the capital to launch a political career tend to be elites and that in Africa a (or the) source of capital has been through the state. Economics and politics are inextricably linked. The power of authority (or command through holding key administrative positions) thus becomes the material route through which other forms of power are maintained. Here we have an elite bias of epic proportions where two decades of democratisation on Africa appear to have had little impact on the configuration of power relations.

But this would be an overly pessimistic conclusion. With hiccoughs along the way, elites are inevitably engaged in electoral processes (a phenomenon rare before 1980). Elites hang on to their structures of wealth and power (Leftwich, 2002, Luckham et al., 2005) but in order to do this different tactics are employed and different outcomes (intended or otherwise) can result.

Change is slow (Carothers, 2007) but small indications of change add up to something bigger – limits on terms of office (van de Walle, 2003), repeated elections and alternation of power (Lindberg, 2004, Lindberg, 2006, Schedler, 2002b) inducing a tipping point (van de Walle, 2005) that causes cohesion amongst opposition politicians and a growing political party stability (Lindberg, 2007).

Socio economic development demands sharp change in the structure of wealth and power in society. This puts pressure on, and resistance from, elites (Leftwich and Hogg, 2007b). Elites have a history of responding to such pressures positively as well as negatively (de Swan, 1988). In the case of elites and politics in Africa, a more neutral view is now emerging. Instead of struggling with ‘getting things right’ (be it the policies, the governance, the institutions, the politics, this view takes what is as a starting point – ‘going with the grain’ (Kelsall, 2008) rather than against it.

Bibliography

- Abbink, J. (2006) Discomfiture of Democracy? The 2005 election crisis in Ethiopia and its aftermath. **African Affairs**, 105: (419): 173-199.
- Bratton, M. and Van de Walle, N. (1994) Neopatrimonial Regimes and Political Transitions in Africa. **World Politics**, 46: (4): 453-489.
- Cammack, D. (2007) The Logic of African Neopatrimonialism: What Role for Donors? **Development Policy Review**, 25: (5): 599-614.
- Carothers, T. (2002) The End of the Transition Paradigm. **Journal of Democracy**, 13 (1): 5-21.
- Carothers, T. (2007) How Democracies Emerge: The Sequencing Fallacy. **Journal of Democracy**, 18: (1): 12-27.
- Chabal, P. and Daloz, J.-P. (1998) **Africa Works: Disorder As Political Instrument**. Oxford and Bloomington: James Currey and Indiana University Press.
- Chandra, K. (2006) "Counting Heads: A Theory of Voter and Elite Behaviour in Patronage-Democracies". In Wilkinson, H.K.a.S. (Ed.) **Patrons, Clients and Policies**. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Collier, D. and Levitsky, S. (1997) Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research. **World Politics**, 49: (3).
- Crook, R.C. (1997) Winning Coalitions and Ethno-Regional Politics: The Failure of the Opposition in the 1990 and 1995 Elections in Cote d'Ivoire. **African Affairs**, 96: (383): 215.
- Daloz, J.-P. (1999) "Introduction générale: Les approches élitaires comme nécessaire antidote". In Daloz, J.-P. (Ed.) **Le (Non-)Renouveau Des Elites en Afrique Subsaharienne**. Bordeaux, Centre D'Etude d'Afrique Noire.
- Daloz, J.-P. (2003) 'Big Men' in Sub-Saharan Africa: How Elites Accumulate Positions and Resources. **Comparative Sociology**, 2: (1).
- de Swan, A. (1988) **In Care of the State: Health Care, Education and Welfare in Europe and the USA in the Modern Era**. Oxford: Polity Press in association with Basil Blackwell.
- Diamond, L. (2002) Elections without Democracy: Thinking about Hybrid Regimes. **Journal of Democracy**, 13: (2).
- Douma, P. (1999) "Poverty, Conflict and Development Interventions in Sub Saharan Africa". Global Development Network.
- Erdmann, G. and Engel, U. (2006) "Neopatrimonialism Revisited – Beyond a Catch-All Concept". German Institute for Global and Area Studies, Research Program: Legitimacy and Efficiency of Political Systems.
- Freedom House (2006) **Freedom in Africa Today** [online]. <http://tinyurl.com/yj9vmy9>
Washington Freedom House [Accessed 5.8.09]
- Freedom House (2009) "Freedom in sub-Saharan Africa 2009: A Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties". Washington, Freedom House.
- Gelb, A. (2001) "South Africa's Role and Importance in Africa and for the Development of the African Agenda". Johannesburg, The Edge Institute.
- Gibson, C. and Hoffman, B. (2002) "Dictators with Empty Pockets: A Political Concession Model of Africa's Democratisation". **Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association**. Boston.
- Hearn, J. (1999) "Foreign Aid, Dmocratisation and Cvil Society in Africa: a Study of South Africa, Ghana and Uganda ". Brighton, Institute of Development Studies.
- Hossain, N. and Moore, M. (2002) "Arguing for the Poor: Elites and Poverty in Developing Countries". Brighton, Institute of Development Studies.
- Hyden, G. (2006) **African Politics in Comparative Perspective**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyden, G. (2008) "Institutions, Power and Policy Outcomes in Africa". London, Africa Power and Politics Programme (APPP), Discussion Paper No. 2, Overseas Development Institute.

- Joseph, R. (2003) Africa: States in Crisis. **Journal of Democracy**, 14: (3).
- Kapuscinski, R. (2001) **The Shadow of the Sun: My African Life**. London: Allan Lane The Penguin Press.
- Kelsall, T. (2008) "Going with the Grain in African Development". London, Power and Politics in Africa.
- Leftwich, A. (2000) **States of Development: On the Primacy of Politics in Development**. Cambridge: Polity.
- Leftwich, A. (2002) Debate: Democracy and Development. A Contradiction in the Politics of Economics. **New Political Economy**, 7: (2): 269-272.
- Leftwich, A. and Hogg, S. (2007a) "Leaders, Elites and Coalitions: The Case for Leadership and the Primacy of Politics in Building Effective States, Institutions and Governance for Economic Growth and Social Development". Leaders, Elites and Coalitions Research Programme (LECRP).
- Leftwich, A. and Hogg, S. (2007b) "Leadership, Elites and Coalitions: The Case for Leadership and the Primacy of Politics in Building Effective States, Institutions and Governance for Economic Growth and Social Development". Leaders, Elites and Coalitions Research Programme (LECRP).
- Lindberg, S.I. (2003) It's Our Time to "Chop": Do Elections in Africa Feed Neo-Patrimonialism rather than Counter-Act It? **Democratization**, 10: (2): 121.
- Lindberg, S.I. (2004) The Democratic Quality of Multi-Party Elections: Participation, Competition and Legitimacy in Africa. **Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Studies**, 42: (1): 61-104.
- Lindberg, S.I. (2006) The Surprising Significance of African Elections. **Journal of Democracy**, 17: (1): 121.
- Lindberg, S.I. (2007) Institutionalization of Party Systems? Stability and Fluidity among Legislative Parties in Africa's Democracies. **Government and Opposition**, 42: (2): 215-241.
- Luckham, R., Gyimah-Boadi, E., Ahadzie, W., et al. (2005) "The Middle Classes and their Role in National Development". Accra, Ghana Centre for Democratic Development.
- Marcus, R.R. and Ratsimbaharison, A.M. (2005) Political Parties in Madagascar: Neopatrimonial Tools or Democratic Instruments? **Party Politics**, 11: (4): 495-512.
- Mbeki, M. (2005) "Perpetuating Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa: How African Political Elites Undermine Entrepreneurship and Economic Development". International Policy Network.
- Mette Kjaer, A. (2004) "Old brooms can sweep too!": An overview of rulers and public sector reforms in Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. **The Journal of Modern African Studies**, 42: (03): 389.
- Milanovic, B. (2003) "Is Inequality in Africa Really Different?". Draft, available at <http://www.worldbank.org/research/inequality/pdf/africa.pdf>.
- Monga, C. (1997) Eight Problems with African Politics. **Journal of Democracy**, 8: (3): 156-170.
- Moore, M. and Hossain, N. (2005) "Elites, Poverty and Public Policy". In Reis, E. & Moore, N. (Eds.) **Elite Perceptions of Poverty and Inequality**. London, Zed Books.
- Mwenda, A.M. and Tangri, R. (2005) Patronage Politics, Donor Reforms, and Regime Consolidation in Uganda. **African Affairs**, 104: (416): 449-467.
- Nkurunziza, J. and Ngaruko, F. (2002) "Explaining Growth in Burundi 1960-2000". Oxford, Centre for the Study of African Economies.
- (2001) **Workshop on Democracy in Africa in Comparative Perspective** Stanford University
- Posner, D.N. (2005) **Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Randall, V. and Svasand, L. (2002) Political Parties and Democratic Consolidation in Africa. **Democratization**, 9: (3): 30.

- Reis, E.P. and Moore, M. (eds.) (2005) **Elite Perceptions of Poverty and Inequality**, London: Zed.
- Resnick, D. (n.d.) "The Path to Gender Equity in Africa: Assessing the Role of Democracy, Development, and Institutions". Cornell University.
- Robinson, M. and Friedman, S. (2005) "Civil Society, Democratisation and Foreign aid in Africa". Brighton, Institute of Development Studies.
- Schatzberg, M. (2001) **Political Legitimacy in Middle Africa: Father, Family, Food**. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Schedler, A. (2002a) Elections without Democracy: The Menu of Manipulation. **Journal of Democracy**, 13: (2): 36-50.
- Schedler, A. (2002b) The Nested Game of Democratisation by Elections. **International Political Science Review**, 23: (1): 103-122.
- Scott, J. (2008) Modes of Power and the Re-Conceptualisation of Elites. **Sociological Review**.
- Shedler, A. (2002) Elections without Democracy: The Menu of Manipulation. **Journal of Democracy**, 13: (2): 36-50.
- (2006) **Africa Beyond Aid** Potsdam, Germany
- Sklar, R. (2000) The Nature of Class Domination in Africa. **The Journal of Modern African Studies**, 17: (4): 531-552.
- Stasavage, D. (2005) Democracy and Education Spending in Africa. **American Journal of Political Studies**, 49: (2): 343-358.
- Swaan, A.d. (1988) **In Care of the State**. Oxford: Blackwell.
- van de Walle, N. (2001) **African Economies and the Politics of Permanent Crisis, 1979-1999**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- van de Walle, N. (2002) Elections without Democracy: Africa's Range of Regimes. **Journal of Democracy**, 13: (2): 66-80.
- van de Walle, N. (2003) Presidentialism and Clientelism in Africa's Emerging Party Systems. **The Journal of Modern African Studies**, 41: (02): 297.
- van de Walle, N. (2005) "When do Oppositions Coalesce in Electoral Autocracies?". Cornell University, The Mario Einaudi Center for International Studies.
- van de Walle, N. (2006) ""Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss"? The Evolution of Political Clientelism in Africa". In Kitschelt, H. & Wilkinson, S.I. (Eds.) **Patrons, Clients and Policies: Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition**. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Ver, H.L.d. (2008) "Leadership, Politics and Development: A Survey". Leaders, Elites and Coalitions Research Programme (LECRP).